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INDUSTRIAL SCHOOLS FOR ALASKAN NATIVE CHILDREN

JANUARY 31, 1925.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. WILLIS, from the Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany H. R. 4825]

The Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 4825), for the establishment of industrial schools for Alaskan native children, and for other purposes, having considered the same, report favorably thereon, and recommend that the bill do pass without amendment.

The need for additional facilities for vocational training among the Indians of Alaska is clearly set forth in the following:

STATEMENT OF MR. WILLIAM HAMILTON, ACTING CHIEF ALASKA DIVISION, BUREAU OF EDUCATION, WASHINGTON, D. C.

Mr. HAMILTON. I am exceedingly sorry that the Commissioner of Education is not in the city. He was in Alaska last summer.

I have prepared an exceedingly brief statement and will try to indicate the present work of the Bureau of Education for the natives of Alaska, and to indicate how that scope could be extended so as to include a description of the extent of industrial training that the excellent provisions of this bill would provide if enacted.

Throughout the vast area of the Territory of Alaska approximately 27,000 natives of various races, are scattered along thousands of miles of coast and on the great rivers in villages ranging from 30 to 40 to 300 or 400 persons. Some of the villages on remote islands or beside the frozen ocean are brought into touch with the outside world only once or twice a year when visited by a United States Coast Guard steamer on its annual cruise or by the supply vessel sent by the Bureau of Education. Many of the settlements have no regular mail service and can communicate with each other and with the outside world only by occasionally passing boats in summer and sleds in winter. During eight months of the year all of the villages in Alaska, with the exception of those on the southern coast, and a few along the Alaska Railroad, are reached only by trails over the snow-covered land or frozen rivers.

In spite of the inherent difficulties of the problem a United States public school has been established in each of 83 villages distributed among the tribes of the southern coast, the Aleuts of the Aleutian Islands, the Athabascans of the interior and the Eskimos of the far western coast and the Arctic regions.

In addition to maintaining schools for the children belonging to the aboriginal races of Alaska the bureau aids entire native communities by extending medical

relief by maintaining sanitary methods of living, by fostering the commercial enterprises of the natives, by promoting the reindeer industry, and by relieving destitution.

In the Alaskan village the school is the center of all activity. The teacher is the guide, leader, and everything else the occasion may demand. To be "teacher" in the narrow schoolroom sense of the word is by no means all of the teacher's duties in Alaska. He must often be physician, nurse, postmaster, business manager, and community builder.

In its endeavor to afford medical relief and to safeguard the health of the native races of Alaska, the Bureau of Education maintains hospitals at Juneau, Kanakanak, Akiak, Nulato, and Noorvik, which are important centers of native population in southern, western, central, and Arctic Alaska, separated from each other by many hundreds of miles.

The hospitals, physicians, and nurses serve only the more thickly populated districts. In the vast outlying areas the teachers must of necessity extend medical aid to the best of their ability. Accordingly, the teachers in settlements where the services of a physician or nurse are not available are supplied with household remedies and instructions for their use.

Each hospital is a center of medical relief for a very wide territory, and each physician must take extended tours throughout his district.

In the great majority of the native settlements the teachers are the only "doctors" and "health officers." It often becomes the duty of a teacher to render first aid to the injured or to care for a patient through the course of a serious illness. The school is often the only place within a radius of several hundred miles where the natives can obtain medicines and medical treatment and they often travel many days to secure the relief desired.

Many of the school buildings contain bathtubs and facilities for the proper washing of clothing, which are greatly appreciated by the entire village, adults as well as children.

In the villages the natives are encouraged to replace their huts by neat, well-built houses. As part of their duty, the teachers visit each house in the village to see that good hygienic conditions are maintained therein, to show mothers how to care for and feed their infants, to demonstrate the proper ways of preparing food, inculcate cleanliness and the necessity of ventilation, and to insist upon the proper disposal of garbage.

Realizing that the future of the native races depends upon the children, special attention is given to them. In the schoolrooms the public towel and drinking cups have been abolished and individual paper ones substituted. Healthful exercises are frequent. Talks are given on tuberculosis, eye diseases, ventilation, and other subjects relating to the prevention of diseases. Cleanliness is insisted upon. The bureau is striving to build up a healthy race of young Alaskans.

In its Alaska reindeer service the bureau has provided a new industry, adapted to community needs, guaranteeing assured support, and resulting in training a primitive race into independence and, in the course of time, into responsible citizenship.

The greatest need in connection with the educational system provided by the Bureau of Education for the natives of Alaska is a system of vocational training. Lacking the means to construct, equip, and maintain suitable buildings for use as industrial schools and for dormitories connected therewith, the curriculum in the schools is, of necessity, too largely of an academic character. There is an obligation upon us to give the natives of Alaska such training as will enable them to live more healthfully, and, by practicing remunerative trades, more readily to earn a livelihood.

In many parts of Alaska the greatest need of the natives is decent houses in which to live. Therefore house building would be one of the principal subjects of instruction. Many natives, with very little supervision, would become excellent carpenters. In all parts of Alaska their skill in carving proves that, with very little instruction, the making of furniture, plain and ornamental, could be made a very remunerative native industry. In the native houses well constructed articles of furniture would take the place of the cheap and often unsatisfactory furniture which they now buy in stores. In the shops they could be taught how to make cooking utensils, sled runners, anchors, chains, and rigging for their boats.

In Alaska almost all communication is by water. From time immemorial the native races of Alaska have been builders of canoes. Many natives have been wonderfully successful in boat building; power boats and small schooners have replaced the primitive native canoe—a marvel of symmetry shaped from a single log. Boat building would therefore be a very important subject for instruction.

The natives could also be taught how to construct and repair engines for their power boats.

The natives' skill in sewing and in the making of ceremonial robes show that they would make excellent tailors. In fact, they would do well in any of the mechanical trades, such as typesetting and printing.

In the weaving of baskets they are unexcelled. This talent which, in some parts of Alaska, appears to be disappearing among the rising generation, could be fostered.

Perhaps this is a sufficient indication as to what could be accomplished in the way of providing a system of vocational training for the native people of Alaska, if the provisions of the bill now under consideration are enacted into law.

The matter has been referred to the War Department and to the Interior Department, and the attitude of those departments is fully stated in the following letters from the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Interior:

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, January 16, 1925.

Hon. FRANK B. WILLIS,
Chairman Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions,
United States Senate.

MY DEAR SENATOR WILLIS: With reference to your letter of December 31, 1924, in which you state that the committee has under consideration H. R. 4825, a bill to authorize the establishment of industrial schools and hospitals for Alaskan native children, concerning which you request an opinion from the War Department as to the wisdom of this legislation and an estimate as to the probable expenses that might be entailed in case the bill should become a law, I regret to inform you that the War Department can express no opinion upon this matter for the reason that it is without information as to the number of natives who will be given instruction in the schools, what construction or changes in existent buildings is contemplated or what utilities will be required for the carrying on of the schools and hospitals referred to in the bill.

There has recently been forwarded to the President a draft of a proposed Executive order transferring to the Interior Department the reservations mentioned in my letter to Hon. C. F. Curry, House of Representatives, dated February 29, 1924, and contained in Report No. 528 attached, including Forts Lisicum and St. Michael, excepting, however, small portions for use of the Signal Corps and for post cemeteries. The buildings on these reservations are in fairly good condition and will be available for the purposes mentioned in the bill.

Sincerely yours,

JOHN W. WEEKS, *Secretary of War.*

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, January 24, 1925.

Hon. FRANK B. WILLIS,
Chairman Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions,
United States Senate.

MY DEAR SENATOR WILLIS: I have received your letter of December 31, 1924, submitting for my consideration H. R. 4825, for the establishment of industrial schools and hospitals for natives of Alaska and requesting my opinion concerning the wisdom of this legislation and an estimate as to the probable expense that might be entailed, in case the bill should become a law.

The great need in connection with the present educational system for the aboriginal races of Alaska is that more training of a vocational character should be provided. The curriculum presented is too largely of an academic character. It is important that such training should be given to the natives of Alaska as will enable them more readily to earn a livelihood in the changing conditions with which the advance of civilization has confronted them. Many of these natives show great talent in carving, weaving, and boat building. By systematic vocational training these natural talents could be wonderfully developed.

The Bureau of Education of this department is now establishing three industrial schools in Alaska at Eklutna, Kanakanak, and White Mountain under existing law and available appropriations, but it is essential that additional schools of this type be established as rapidly as may be possible.

The bill under consideration would make it feasible to establish schools and hospitals at considerably less cost by making use of buildings and building materials now in Alaska and owned by the Government, and which will not be needed for other governmental purposes.

Of the posts mentioned by the Secretary of War in his letter of January 16, 1924, Fort Gibbon would be a very good location for an industrial school and it might be advisable to establish a hospital at the same place.

The estimated cost of an industrial school at Fort Gibbon would be:

For the first year	\$34, 920
For the second year	26, 920

The estimated cost of a hospital established in Government buildings would be:

For the first year	\$27, 880
For the second year	19, 380

The bill is desirable, also, in order to facilitate the establishment of additional schools and hospitals as need for them develops and other army posts and buildings become available, although on the basis of present information there would be established immediately only one additional industrial school and one additional hospital.

Inasmuch as land is needed in connection with industrial schools, I recommend that the bill be amended by inserting on page 1, line 11, after the word "buildings" the words "including necessary lands."

With this amendment, I recommend favorable action on the bill.

The foregoing report was submitted to the Bureau of the Budget, and on January 20, 1925, the director advised that the report would not conflict with the financial program of the President.

Very truly yours,

HUBERT WORK.

By the transfer to the Interior Department of buildings no longer needed by the War Department, a very material sum can be saved in providing needed facilities for the furtherance of the important work of affording vocational training and hospitalization for the Alaskan Indians.

